



AFT Connecticut
AFT, AFL-CIO

Healthcare
Higher Education
Public Employees
PSRP
Teachers

Testimony
SHARON M. PALMER

Appropriations Committee

February 16, 2010

Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Committee. Thank you for providing this hearing opportunity.

I am Sharon Palmer, President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse 28,000 member AFL-CIO union.

I'll be brief and offer some suggestions which I hope you will consider as you move through these very difficult financial circumstances:

ECS: It is critical to secure the base funding and increase if at all possible. We all know school districts are using federal funds to balance their budgets. As federal funding ends it will be virtually impossible to catch up if ECS funding remains flat or is reduced.

MORE Commission: The education subcommittee of MORE has been working hard on efficiencies primarily in the area of regionalization. Please give serious consideration to the recommendations as the report becomes final.

CommPACT Schools: CommPACT schools are local charter schools. We urge you to redirect the Governor's five million dollar proposal for additional seats for state charters to CommPACT local charters. It is a more cost effective use of resources and the CommPACT schools work with all the children in the local school.

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Charter Schools: We urge you to reject proposals for "*money follows the child funding*" and using a statewide average to determine per pupil funding. The *money follows the child* proposal takes scarce funding from local districts which are already providing resources by statute and by individual M.O.U.s. with charter schools. Using a statewide average for per pupil funding will mean an increase of approximately \$1,000 per pupil in a time when districts are struggling to meet basic needs.

Special Education: As you know, Special Education is one of the most unpredictable costs for a district. Please at least maintain the current excess grants formula and consider improving it if possible.

Vocational Technical High Schools and the LPN program: Some of our Vocational Technical High Schools are reaching a "tipping point" as we saw at Wright Tech. These schools need major renovation. The longer their issues remain unattended, the more uncertain their future becomes and the parents are reluctant to enroll their children. We urge you to support the efforts of Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischman, co-chairs of the Education Committee, to address the needs of these important schools.

We also urge you to restore the LPN program. It has become more expensive to close the program than to keep it open. We need more good paying jobs in Connecticut and this program provides the opportunity to get a good job.

Again, thank you for providing this hearing. I don't envy you. This is the most difficulty I have ever seen our financial status. We are trying to work with you through the MORE Commission, SEBAC and other collaborative opportunities. We want to be part of the solution.